

In this week's *Parashah*, we read about the incident known as "*Mei Merivah*," in which Moshe Rabbeinu hit the rock instead of speaking to it, as *Hashem* had commanded him to do. As a result, *Hashem* decreed that Moshe and Aharon would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*. We also read this week about Aharon's passing.

R' Yitzchak Isaac Sher z"l (1875-1951; *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Slobodka Yeshiva in Lithuania and Bnei Brak) writes: Our Sages teach that a maidservant who witnessed the Splitting of the Sea saw more than the prophet Yechezkel saw. (Yechezkel is the prophet who describes *Hashem's* "throne," in what is probably the most esoteric chapter in *Tanach*.) R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204) teaches, R' Sher notes, that the maidservant's vision was not a one-time event; rather, the Jewish People maintained this level for all of the 40 years that they were in the desert.

"Given the level that even a maidservant attained," R' Sher writes, "I am accustomed to encourage students to see earlier generations in a more elevated way, to recognize that they served *Hashem* with unparalleled attachment to Him, and that all their sins were only slight missteps that merely detracted from their perfection. One might argue," R' Sher acknowledges, "that I am deviating from the *Pshat* / straightforward reading of the verses; however, the incident *Mei Merivah* proves my point."

He explains: *Hashem* says to Moshe (20:12), "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of *Bnei Yisrael*." Despite this strong language, *Rambam* writes that Moshe's sin was only that he became angry at *Bnei Yisrael*. Because *Bnei Yisrael* knew that Moshe did nothing except what was *Hashem's* will, they interpreted Moshe's anger as a sign that *Hashem*, too, was angry at them. But *Hashem* was not; all *Bnei Yisrael* had done was ask for water! For a person of Moshe's stature, this relatively minor sin is equivalent to lacking *Emunah* / belief in G-d. – *Continued on page 3* –

## Shabbat

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 64a) teaches: "Torah scholars have no rest--not in *Olam Ha'zeh* / this world, and not in *Olam Ha'ba* / the World-to-Come, as we read (*Tehilim* 84:8), "They advance from strength to strength; each one will appear before G-d in Zion." [Until here from the *Gemara*] This requires explanation, writes R' Yaakov Meir Shechter *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Sha'ar Hashamayim in Yerushalayim and a leader of *Breslov Chassidim*), for we refer to *Shabbat* as "a taste of *Olam Ha'ba*," and *Shabbat* certainly is a day of rest!

R' Shechter explains: R' Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (the *Shelah Hakadosh*; rabbi of Prague and Yerushalayim; died 1630) writes, "The ultimate rest is to have no rest." R' Shechter illustrates: People who go on vacation do not sit still. They move from one tourist attraction to another, and they find that to be restful. Likewise, a Torah scholar's restfulness in *Olam Ha'ba* will not come from remaining stationary; it will come from moving constantly from one spiritual level to the next.

R' Shechter continues: We read (*Bereishit* 2:1), "*Vychulu* / The heaven and the earth were finished." R' Chaim ben Attar z"l (1696-1743; Morocco, Italy and *Eretz Yisrael*; known as the *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh*) comments that the root of the word "*Vychulu*" can connote (in addition to the translation above) a state of yearning, as in the verse (*Tehilim* 84:3), "My soul yearns, indeed *Kalta* / it pines, for the courtyards of *Hashem* . . ." The *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh* says that, with the creation of this yearning, Creation was completed. This means, explains R' Shechter, that with the creation of *Shabbat*, *Hashem* created the possibility of yearning for *Hashem*. Without such yearning, the rest of Creation would have been meaningless and would have lacked permanence. (*Yom Machamadim* p.96)

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R' Sher continues: The lofty stature of the figures in *Tanach* is illustrated by the Torah's description (also in our *Parashah*) of Aharon's death. Our Sages teach that Aharon wore the vestments of the *Kohen Gadol* until moments before his death, when he merited to see his son Elazar don them. But how was Aharon allowed to wear the priestly garments when he was not performing the service in the *Mishkan*? Not only were they reserved for performing the *Avodah* / Temple service, they included *Sha'atnez*, for which the Torah gives a special dispensation only during the *Avodah*! How could Aharon wear them when he was climbing the mountain and preparing to die?

R' Sher answers: Our Sages say that a *Tzaddik's* death atones for the Jewish People like the bringing of a sacrifice. Thus, from the perspective of Aharon, since he was constantly attached to *Hashem* and focused on his mission, he was performing *Avodah* even as he prepared to pass away. There was nothing personal about Aharon's final moments; they were all part of his continual service of *Hashem* and the Jewish People. That is the plane on which these figures lived. (*Lekket Sichot Mussar*)

R' Yitzchak Meir Rotenberg-Alter z"l (1799-1866; first *Gerrer Rebbe*) writes: As earlier commentaries note, the Torah is very vague about what Moshe's sin was, and no explanation is completely satisfying. It would seem to be *Chutzpah* for us to examine what Moshe and Aharon's sin might have been, for surely it was something so subtle that we would never recognize it as a sin. Nevertheless, since the Torah wrote about it, we are permitted to reflect upon it, and, in every generation, lessons are revealed that are relevant to that time. (*Chiddushei Ha'Rim*)

If the sins of the great people in *Tanach* were so subtle, why does the Torah describe them in such dramatic terms? For example, why does the Torah (*Bereishit* 35:22) say that Yaakov's son Reuven committed adultery, when it really means only that he mixed into his father's private affairs (see *Shabbat* 55b)?

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: The Torah wants us to understand that every small act or omission by our forebearers left a tremendous imprint on Jewish history. Had the Torah described Reuven's (or another great person's) sin with all the subtlety it actually had, we who are reading about it at a tremendous distance, both in time and in spiritual stature, would not appreciate the event's impact on our world. (*Ain Ayah*)

**“Moshe and Aharon gathered the congregation before the rock and he said to them, ‘Listen now, rebels, shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?’” (20:10)**

Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven Gerondi z"l (Spain; 1320-1376) writes: The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 40a) teaches, “The awe of the *Tzibbur* / congregation shall be upon you always!” This, R' Nissim explains, is why Moshe Rabbeinu was punished for saying, in our verse, “Listen now, rebels!” Individually, each of the people complaining to Moshe deserved to be called a “rebel.” However, the respect owed the *Tzibbur* is greater than the sum of the respect owed the *Tzibbur's* individual members.

R' Nissim adds: This is what the Torah is teaching us, as well, by including the foul-smelling *Chelbenah* herb in the *Ketoret* / incense-offering. (*Derashot HaRan* #1)

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) writes: Moshe's words, “Listen now, rebels,” indicate that he became angry. Likewise, the fact that Moshe struck the rock twice (verse 11) indicates that he was angry. Yet, *Hashem* does not rebuke Moshe for anger; instead He says (verse 12), “Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of *Bnei Yisrael*.” Where in our verses do we see any shortcoming in Moshe's *Emunah* / belief in *Hashem*?

*Maharal* answers: *Emunah* leads to *Shirah* / song and to *Simchah* / joy. Therefore, unless there is a shortcoming in a person's *Emunah*, he will never become angry. Moshe's anger is, therefore, a sign of some shortcoming, however, slight, in Moshe's *Emunah*, *Maharal* writes.

*Midrash Rabbah* relates: *Hashem* said to Moshe, “If you had spoken to the rock, it would have given its water, and My Name would have been sanctified among the Jewish People.” [Until here from the *Midrash*]. *Maharal* explains: Getting water from a rock is miraculous no matter how it is done, but only words spoken, and acts done, with *Simchah* can inspire others to *Emunah*. Thus, by hitting the rock in anger, Moshe missed an opportunity to inspire others and thereby to sanctify G-d's Name.

(*Gevurot Hashem*, ch. 7)

Elsewhere, *Maharal* elaborates: A person with *Emunah* places his *Bitachon* / trust in *Hashem*. In turn, *Bitachon* leads to *Simchah*, for a person with *Bitachon* relies on *Hashem's* goodness and, therefore, has no worries. In contrast, one who lacks *Bitachon* is full of worries and troubles, and, as a result, lacks *Simchah*. (*Gur Aryeh*)